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Reflections of my Father

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By Loretta L. Stein, MD



Despite the endless gratitude from patients and highest recognition from colleagues, my father always stressed to my sisters and me his cardinal rule- always be humble.

I grew up inspired by my father's genuine dedication and seemingly boundless energy for taking care of patients.

I remember hearing him call his post- op patients from home at the end of the day to check on how they were feeling. I recall admiring the prominently displayed thank you cards and gifts from patients that he brought home year after year. Despite the endless gratitude from patients and highest recognition from colleagues, he always stressed to my sisters and me his cardinal rule- always be humble.

As a plastic surgery fellow from the University of Pennsylvania, my father conducted an animal model study demonstrating the use of peritoneal tissue as a viable and cosmetically superior conjunctival graft in eyes damaged by thermal injury as compared to buccal mucosa, which was most commonly used at the time. He won the Lehigh Valley Hospital Bosanac Research and Publication Award for his work in 1984. These



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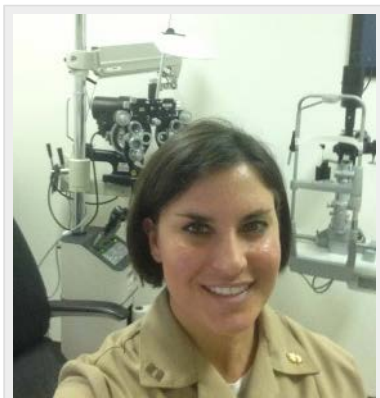
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days, we have the option of using amniotic membrane and keratoprotheses for conjunctival and corneal grafts in these patients. But to me, the most notable aspect about my father's research was his interest in looking for a new opportunity to use his surgical expertise in an innovative way in order to treat the whole patient.



My father told me that patients simply want to know that you gave them your undivided attention.

One of my father's most helpful lessons came while sitting in my cramped medical school dorm room surrounded by textbooks which I had pored over during the preceding two years of lectures and exams. I was nervous about my transition into the hospital to examine patients, worried that I would fumble around them and appear novice. He reassured me that all I had to do was give patients the attention that they deserve. He told me that when you listen to their story, *really listen*. When you look at their face, *really look*. When you feel their abdomen, *really feel*. He told me that patients simply want to know that you gave them your undivided attention.

Almost 30 years

after my father's conjunctival graft study, I became an ophthalmology resident. On my first day of orientation, he became seriously ill and passed away shortly afterward. I sojourned on with my training, and much like other residents, I became immersed in learning the trade- studying for OKAPs, preparing grand rounds, taking call, logging surgical cases, as well as conducting my own research. As I embark on my final year of residency, I reflect upon how far I have come in just a few short years. Even so, I ask myself, am I the kind of doctor that my father was to his patients? Am I the kind of doctor that he thought I would be? Am I the kind of doctor I want to be?



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In ophthalmology, we use the principle of total internal reflection to look through our gonioscopy lens and look at the angles of the eye that we don't routinely examine. At the start of this academic year, I encourage each of us to take a moment and look within. And when you look, *really look*.

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